



the front line

The Riverina-Murray Institute of Higher Education, 8km from the city of Wagga Wagga was the setting for the Libraries Alone: Rural and Isolated Libraries Conference held 21-23 July.

The aim of the conference, the second of its kind to be held in recent years, was to gather together librarians from rural and isolated areas in Australia to discuss and disseminate ideas and practical ways of solving the problems inherent in being physically separate from the main centres of population.

In keeping with the emphasis on practical problem-solving, the conference included a mix of plenary and workshop sessions, covering such topics as education and professional development of libraries; networks and regional co-operation; financial and political management and the provision of library services in rural and isolated areas. There was also a trade display.

Some 200 delegates from around Australia and a sprinkling from overseas obviously benefited greatly from the uncommon experience of meeting together and discussing professional issues of common interest. Those of us who work in large centres of population are generally unaware of the problems facing those who work in physical isolation in remote parts of the country and I found it a rewarding experience to participate in some of the discussions.

One which was of particular interest to me,

of course, was the role of the LAA (and other professional associations) for rural and isolated libraries. No better indication of the positive role an association like ours can play was the organisation of the Libraries Alone Conference itself which was initiated by the Riverina Regional Group. Numbers of constructive suggestions were put forward as to how the LAA might further help those working in isolation, such as providing videos of talks given at Branch and Section meetings; teleconferencing; special funding etc. The overriding message, however, was that 'we' are the Association, and that its strength resides in all of us, not in any one group. On this occasion, I'm sure that all participants were grateful to Roy Sanders and his hard working committee for providing both the opportunity for, and the substance of, a constructive and stimulating meeting.

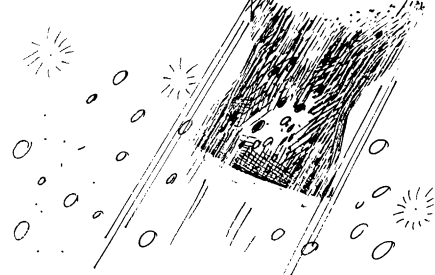
On a recent visit to Canberra, I had the pleasure of presenting an LAA *Letter of Recognition* to Mr Robert Barnes, of the Classics Department, ANU. This award which the Association introduced a few years ago recognises the special contribution made by an individual to the Association or to Australian libraries and librarianship. A note about Mr Barnes' significant and generous donation of many hundreds of books to the ANU Library appeared in *InCite* No 13.

In an informative and entertaining response to the presentation, Mr Barnes expressed his gratitude to the Association, and went on to make some remarks on private book-collecting and book-donating with the encouragement that others should do likewise. He also spoke, however, of Australia's lack of a 'national library policy' and of the fact that there are only a few really complete collections, of world standard, on any area in any Australian library. The need for a NIP is as urgent as ever!

And finally a note of appreciation to Vice President Alan Bundy for two fascinating and informative contributions to this column over the past month.

Peter Dawkins
President

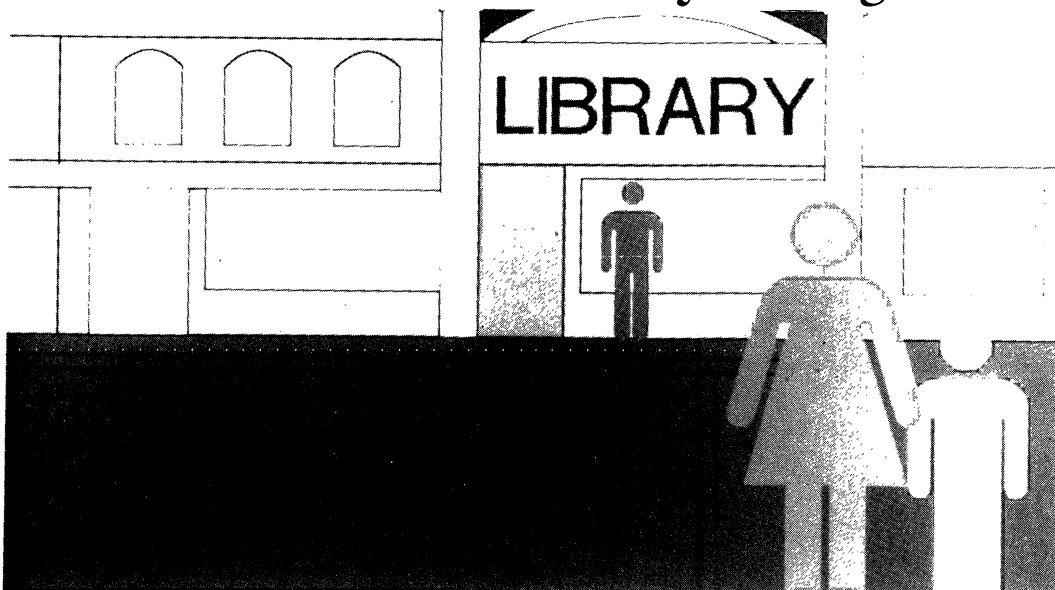
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